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ABSTRACT

A framework is presented for syllabus design in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction. A case is given for a discourse level focus in the ESL classroom, from beginning stages of learning through advanced levels. Following this, three rhetorical modes (critical analysis of fiction, truth-searching logical conversation, and classical argumentative essay writing) are suggested as the central activities in a context-based, textbook-free, and highly individualized ESL program. The use of Mohr's discourse chart is discussed, and a conversation grading chart is presented. Contains 8 references. (Author/LB)

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MAKING SENSE IN ESL:
A Set of Three Rhetorical Structures

Robert Bruce Scott

Abstract: This paper presents a coherent framework for syllabus design in English as a Second Language instruction. A case is given for a discourse level focus in the ESL classroom, from beginning stages of learning through advanced levels. Then, three rhetorical modes, critical analysis of fiction, truth-searching logical conversation, and classical argumentative essay writing, are suggested as the central activities in a content-based, textbook-free, and highly individualized ESL program.

The teacher gathers up some corrected assignments, grabs the main textbook and lesson plan, makes an effort at a cheery remark as a token of comradery with fellow laborers, and strides out the door and across the street to the building where a class must be conducted for fifty minutes every day of the work week. Exactly thirty seconds after the bell has rung, the teacher enters the room, as if trespassing upon what has been up to that moment a festive atmosphere of intense conversation in several different languages: now all eyes, four fewer than a week ago, drift in the direction of the arriving teacher, searching hopefully for an indication that he or she has somehow miraculously been inspired since the last class session and has come ready to engage them in something which will stimulate their minds.

The same old dull pair of eyes stare back at them, dashing all hope, and the vocal orifice releases its mysteriously hypnotic monotonous speech patterns, instructing the obedient students to turn to page whatever. Another session of survival English has begun. Students will improve their ability to keep their eyes open while their brains sleep; they will learn how to even more effectively please their teacher with the correct responses to given stimuli; they will become even better at smiling at the teacher's private jokes. At the end of today's class, that bothersome weed of communication which makes life so complicated will have been prevented from growing and spreading so freely: perhaps one day the teacher will succeed in stamping it out forever.

Down the hall something a little different is happening in another section of the same class-level. Everyone, including the teacher, enters the room at about the same time, chatting and exchanging benevolent greetings. As they enter the room, they see another student busy writing things on the chalkboard and

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organizing her notes. The students and the teacher sit down, the presenter passes out pre-listening questions and an outline of her presentation, and class begins. She gives a general description of the topic which she chose six weeks earlier, and then outlines two differing opinions concerning that topic. During her presentation, she is politely interrupted on several occasions by her fellow classmates, who ask her to clarify particular points or to support certain assertions with adequate evidence. Even the teacher must raise his hand and be called on in order to contribute to the discussion. Every person in the room pays attention to everything said.

The presenter decides to go further than just a description of two opposing views on the issue, and courageously expresses her own belief, highlighting the evidence which she considers most pertinent. After a quick true-false post-listening quiz, the classroom erupts into fervent applause. Few people even notice that the bell to end class has rung long ago. As most of the students leave, others stay behind to continue the discussion with the presenter. That "bothersome weed of communication" is flourishing anew under the watchful care of an ESL teacher-gardener.

Obviously, these two scenarios do not exhaust anywhere near the full range of possibilities for ESL instruction. Instead, they could be considered as distant neighbors along a spectrum of communicative emphasis in the classroom. The assumption in the rest of the paper you are reading is that the second of the two scenarios given above is the preferable one. The rest of this paper presents the fundamentals of an approach to ESL instruction which has actually resulted in the kind of exciting classroom interaction described in scenario number two.

In order to make sense of English, teachers and students can impose rigid rhetorical structures upon reading material, conversational exchanges, and their own writing. The key to the success of such a strategy depends on the range of applicability for the selected rhetorical structures throughout the extent of English language use and also on the relative simplicity of the structures. Language exchanges must be simplified rather than further complicated by instruction in the chosen rhetorical modes.

The focus of my approach to ESL is placed on critical analysis of fiction, truth-searching logical conversation, and classical argumentative essay writing. Each of these activities stimulates a high degree of language processing in both the teacher and the learner, exposing them to large quantities of lexical items and syntactic relationships all contained within extended contexts which reinforce language acquisition by their length and semantic complexity. These activities also provide intellectual stimulation which readily

translates into pleasing language experiences: students and teachers soon come to relish each new opportunity to participate in successful communication. ESL learners carry with them from such interaction a positive attitude and successful strategies for organizing their further language experiences outside and beyond the ESL classroom.

The following is an abbreviated set of questions and answers which attempt to delineate the respective roles of syntax, pronunciation, and content in second language instruction. First, what is the goal of second language instruction? The goal of second language instruction is to enable learners to participate in meaningful communication events in the target language with a majority of the humans who use that language. Second, what constitutes a majority of the humans who use the target language, in the case of any given language? The majority of target language users signifies a group of people who are generally tolerant of a greater degree of diversity in acoustic phenomena and syntactic form than is any single minority group of users of that same target language. Third, what does it mean to participate in meaningful communication events? To participate in meaningful communication events means to be able to judge the appropriateness of an utterance in the context of a communication event, and to be able to produce utterances to fit into contexts which have been established by mutual consent in accordance with Grice's cooperative principle of logical conversation (1975:41-44).

Next, it is necessary to consider the implications of the answers given above, i.e., the applications of these answers for the second language classroom. First, how can a second language teacher enable his or her students to participate in meaningful communication events? This can be done through guided interaction which continuously focuses on meaning rather than on syntax or phonetic facts(Krashen 1985:92). Why not focus on syntax? Syntax is generally restricted to the sentence level, and by exploring intrasentential combinatory patterns the learner's focus is moved away from intersentential and paragraph or discourse relations, i.e., away from the context which gives any particular utterance its meaning by virtue of how that utterance adapts to contextual constraints on appropriateness; this concept of appropriateness derives from Wittgenstein (1953:144). Why not focus on phonetic facts? Pronunciation drill, including all the manifestations of this type of activity, the instructional mode of choice for teachers who wish to focus on phonetic facts, draws the learner's attention away from the context of an utterance or communication act, and even more narrowly limits the learner's focus by often ignoring sentence-level constraints on individual lexical events.

The three rhetorical structures to be presented in this paper, and their associated activities, address the needs of ESL learners in the area of content sequencing, helping them to

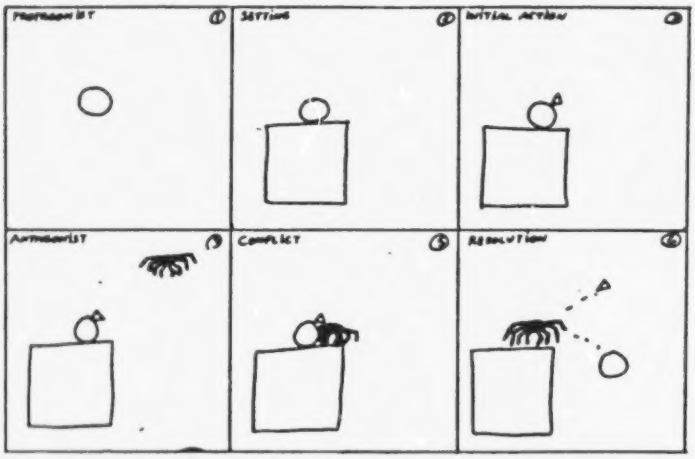
organize reading and listening content in such ways that comprehension becomes a matter of fitting language into appropriate rhetorical categories, while written and spoken responses are created from within the constraints of a similarly limited set of categories. This attempt to fit language into rigid rhetorical structural categories forces learners to focus entirely on what is being communicated rather than allowing them to be needlessly distracted by novel lexical items or unfamiliar syntactic units. This is precisely the kind of focus required for effective language acquisition (Krashen 1985:2).

In the skill area of reading, I have chosen to emphasize critical analysis of fiction as the key rhetorical mode. Grellet (1981:7) suggests that "reading is a constant process of guessing, and what one brings to the text is often more important than what one finds in it." The global context for fiction is concurrently present at several levels: life itself provides the general context which allows readers to comprehend and empathize with characters and actions in a story; the developing plot provides a more limited context which constrains the possibilities for further developments, i.e., the reader can predict a small number of conceivable next moves; finally, the sentence-level environment of new lexical items helps the reader to guess meanings, such guesses constrained simultaneously at all three levels of context.

The format of critical analysis which I have selected as the rhetorical structure to simplify content organization for the ESL reader of fiction was presented by Lincoln (1986:unpublished seminar). She suggests that all stories, no matter their length, can be analyzed in terms of: protagonist, setting, initial action, antagonist, conflict, and resolution. She uses the "Little Miss Muffet" nursery rhyme and a series of six abstract figures to convey and illustrate how to apply the six terms to the analysis of a piece of fiction.

The first line, "Little Miss Muffet", introduces the protagonist, illustrated by Lincoln by a circle upon an empty background. The second line, "sat on a tuffet", gives the setting, and the cumulatively constructed figure shows a circle atop a square. The next figure is of a circle atop a square, with a small triangle placed contiguous to the circle, the triangle representing the initial action given in the third line, "eating her curds and whey". The antagonist appears in line four, "along came a spider", and figure four adds another geometric shape up in the left-hand corner of the picture frame, some distance away from the more centered circle, triangle, and square shapes. In line five of the rhyme, the conflict is described, "which sat down beside her", and this conflict is represented in figure five by placing spider shape (as it turns out, a spider image itself works well here and seems to apply to most manifestations of the antagonist archetype[2]) next to the circle atop the square. Finally

the conflict is resolved in line six, "and scared poor Miss Muffet away", this resolution reflected in the falling away of the circle from atop the square, leaving the triangle up in the air and the spider-shape as the sole occupant of the top edge of the square.



Modified Version of Lincoln's Art

This series of figures and the accompanying nursery rhyme work very well as an introduction to the critical fiction analysis format. Students readily grasp the six basic concepts, and can then begin to apply them in their analyses of everything from the most basic short beginner-level stories to much longer and more complex advanced novels. One effective way to introduce this rhetorical form is within the context of an almost completed reading of a story which has been handled together as a class. Near the end of the story, if students are introduced to this way of analyzing a story, the class as a whole can attempt to reach concensus on who the protagonist and antagonist are, where and when the setting is, what the initial "starter" action is (not necessarily the first active verb), and how the main conflict between the protagonist and antagonist can be described. Then, as students approach the end of the story, they tend to or can be encouraged to guess how the conflict will be resolved, which piques interest at what is often a crucial point in the process of reading a story.

Then, the class as a whole can construct a book report on the story, dividing the report into sections equivalent to the six basic terms listed and described above. It is a good idea for the teacher to provide students with a model book report, preferably written by the teacher about a book he or she has

recently enjoyed reading, before asking students to start doing reports on stories of their own choosing.

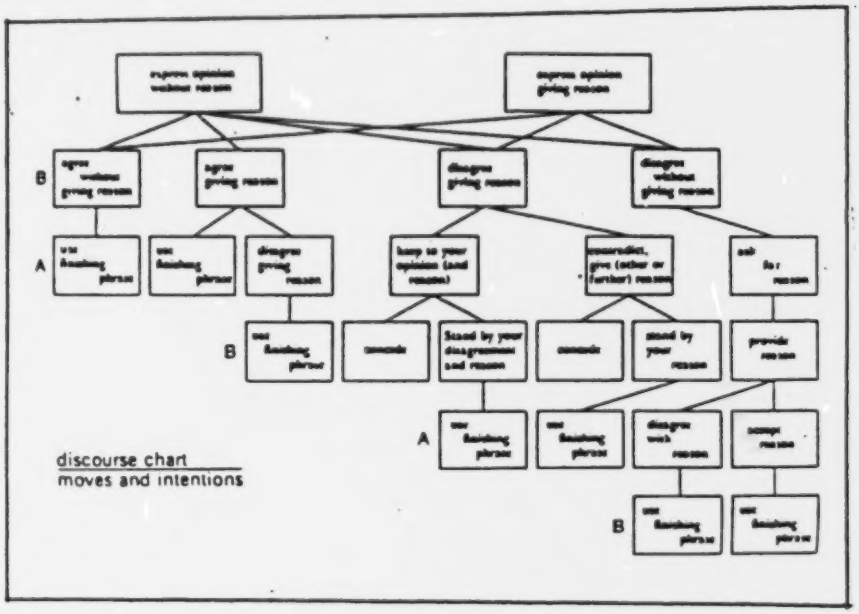
In the skill area of conversation, the rhetorical structure which I have chosen to emphasize is truth-searching logical conversation. In making this choice, I have not ignored the fact that a good number of English conversations are not particularly logical: a safe assertion would be that many conversations in English are simply exercises in free association, with no discernible form, goal, or purpose other than for enjoyment. However, such conversations lie outside the scope of ESL instruction; our students can hardly be expected to achieve complete competency for such free-form discussions, as this would entail profound experience within the language and a wide knowledge of various connotations and associations which are inextricably bound to the culture. Nevertheless, ESL students should be expected to achieve another kind of fluency, in which they become able to consciously move a talk in a given direction by building upon what has been said.

A further rationale for concentrating on logical conversation is the general rule that the more academic a discussion the more rigidly logically organized it tends to be: since much ESL instruction aims toward preparing the learner for participation in English-speaking academic settings, it follows that a focus on a formal conversational mode such as truth-searching logical conversation is advantageous to the learner.

The truth-searching logical conversation ESL teaching method has evolved since its introduction (Scott 1985:30-42). The basis for this method is the way in which Peter Mohr's discourse chart (1981:154) implicitly teaches Grice's rules of logical conversation (1975:41-58). First, the rule of quantity is upheld, since opinions without a sufficient amount of reasoning either force the conversation to end abruptly or force the other participant to send back a request for more information. Second, the rule of quality is upheld, since reasons can be contradicted and held up to inspection by either participant. Third, the rule of relevance is upheld, since nothing except a relevant statement can be made to fit into any of the available categories. Fourth, the rule of manner is upheld, since orderliness and directness are intrinsic to the discourse chart itself.

At an intermediate level of English proficiency, ESL learners can easily be taught to understand the labels used on the Mohr chart. Then, it is useful to help them plot sample conversations through the chart until they become proficient at fitting conversational moves into appropriate intention slots. Next, the teacher can outline various routes through the chart so that students in pairs can develop their own written conversations to match each route. At this point, students can be exposed to carefully selected recorded conversations which they attempt to

plot along appropriate pathways on the chart.



Mohr's Discourse Chart

After gaining proficiency in the above described chart activities, students are ready for orchestrated logical conversations. These can be handled in either or both of two ways, depending on whether a competitive atmosphere exists in the class. If there is such an atmosphere, students will probably have a good time during a flashcard exercise[3]. The class is divided into two teams to participate in a debate-like activity, in which the next person in line from each team attempts to form a statement which fulfills the requirements of a given label displayed on a large flashcard within a series of such cards following a particular route along the discourse chart. For the sake of continuity and in order to cultivate extended discourse habits, the teacher should feel free to enlarge on and even improvise within the rather limited number of exchanges included on the Mohr chart.

Another way to provide orchestrated logical conversation practice is through the use of conversation booklets. The pages of these booklets look just like the flashcards in the above activity. Students are provided with a list of optional topics or may choose their own. Some popular topics often result from a survey of current magazines and newspapers, or from the free exercise of the teacher's imagination. Each pair of students chooses at random a conversation booklet, and their ensuing

conversation follows each successive rhetorical cue in a sort of discovery adventure. The teacher's role during this second type of orchestrated logical conversation activity is to move slowly from one pair to the next, eavesdropping and answering any questions.

Both of the orchestrated truth-searching logical conversation activities described above can produce a lot of enthusiasm in the classroom. Students often do not notice the passage of time while engrossed in this kind of activity. In order to ensure the success of these orchestrated conversations, however, it is important that the teacher provide a number of different routes for conversations to follow. In developing these alternate routes, it is necessary to diverge considerably from the limited possibilities included on the Mohr chart. This is necessary because the Mohr chart labels and sequences assume that once two participants disagree it is inevitable that there will be a winner and a conceding loser, or else that both participants will escape through a finishing phrase. This assumption ignores two other possibilities: if discovery of truth is the common goal among participants in a logical conversation, then there can be no loser; furthermore, such "truth" is frequently negotiated among the participants in a conversation, with a new middle-ground opinion surfacing to cover strong evidence from all sides. Students should be encouraged to take this open-minded approach to conversation rather than the more dogmatically entrenched view that each participant is simply defending opinion-turf.

After some experience with orchestrated truth-searching logical activities, students can receive and comprehend a lecture on the guiding principles of logical conversation (Grice 1975: 45-46). These principles will appear reasonable to the students since they have been working within a model which implicitly contains the very same principles. It is a good idea to present the cooperative principle and the underlying rule categories by way of examples in which each rule is broken. Such examples can be found in everyday encounters, or can be invented in order to capitalize on the humor of many imaginable exchanges. After such a presentation, students are ready to consciously monitor and participate in unorchestrated conversations, with no cues. These can be taped and analyzed and evaluated by the teacher, utilizing a tool such as the one below (Scott 1985:42).

Instructions: Under each rule category, choose the descriptor which best fits the student's contributions. Award the student the corresponding number of points in that category. Finally, give an assessment of how well the student followed the cooperative principle, on a scale of one to twenty points. Total possible points is one hundred.

Quantity:	0	rambling uncontrollably
	5	too much extraneous information
	15	too much detail, but message and direction clear
	20	appropriate
	15	lacking in detail, but message and direction clear
	5	essential information lacking
	0	silence
Quality:	0	central statement is contrary to fact
	5	central statement could be true, but faulty reasons given
	10	central statement could be true, no reason given
	15	central statement probably true, no reason given
	20	central statement nicely supported by reasons
Relevance:	0	nonsense(non-sequiturs)
	5	bordering on nonsense, but touching topic
	10	each statement has some relationship to preceding ones
	15	statements often directly connected to previous ones
	20	relevant contributions every time
Manner:	0	disorganized and ambiguous
	5	loosely organized and ambiguous
	10	loosely organized and clear
	15	well organized, but ambiguous
	20	well organized and clear(perspicuous)

Conversation Grading Chart

In the skill area of writing, I choose to emphasize the rhetorical mode of classical argumentative essay writing. This kind of essay posits a thesis and a differing antithesis, evidence for both of which is presented, that in favor of the antithesis being disproved and that in favor of the thesis being upheld. The primary rationale for focusing entirely on this rhetorical form is that most other forms can be subsumed within it. For example, a comparison-contrast essay becomes, within the argumentative approach, a treatment of the thesis that the objects of comparison are similar versus the antithesis that they are different, or even a treatment of the thesis that the objects in question are comparable versus the antithesis that there is no basis for any comparison. A classification essay becomes a treatment of the question of appropriate classification, pitting the thesis that a certain number of items are elements of a single group against the antithesis that they are not. Most such essay-types can be treated within the longer context of the classical argumentative essay.

A secondary rationale for concentrating on the argumentative essay format is the fact that it is applicable across a wide

range of fields of enquiry, from literature to chemical engineering: in every field new ideas and old traditions are debated over as their proponents search for truth and vie for dominant roles in that profession. ESL learners who enter their chosen fields of study with the ability to analyze problems through use of the argumentative essay rhetorical mode possess a marked advantage over their peers who might not even be aware that the information they receive in classes only represents currently accepted opinion and is open to question and testing. The focus on argumentative essay writing in ESL prepares ESL learners to take active roles in their classwork and in their chosen areas of specialization at both the secondary and university levels and beyond.

Classical argumentative essay writing derives from Aristotelian rhetoric. Each paragraph in this essay format has a clearly defined rhetorical purpose, and the ultimate goal of the essay is to convince the reader that the thesis is correct, not only on its own merits but also rhetorically by default because the antithesis is incorrect. The parts of the essay are exordium, narratio, propositio, partitio, reprehensio, confirmatio, an optional digressio, and the peroratio. ESL students can be introduced to the terms and descriptions of each part of the argumentative essay, and then helped to label the different parts of a sample essay, preferably one written by the teacher for the students. Then, the following pre-writing procedure can be presented:

1. Get a topic.
2. Form your own opinion on some facet of this topic.
3. Imagine another opinion in opposition to your own.
4. Construct the propositio, or antithesis-thesis.
5. Think of two or three strong pieces of evidence or logical reasons to support the antithesis.
6. Think of two or three strong pieces of evidence or logical reasons to support your thesis.

After students have completed the pre-writing procedure for a given topic, the following writing procedure can be presented:

1. Write the introductory paragraph, which includes the exordium(hook) to catch the reader's interest and the narratio to establish an intersection between the reader's set of knowledge, experience, and ideas and your own such set, regarding the topic.
2. Write the second paragraph.
   a. The propositio from step four of the pre-writing procedure is the first sentence of this paragraph.
   b. The reasons or evidence for each opinion, from steps five and six of the pre-writing, comprise the rest of paragraph two, the partitio, or plan.

3. Construct the reprehensio, or the two or three paragraphs in which you disprove, one by one, the two or three reasons which form the support for the antithesis.
4. Construct the confirmatio, or the two or three paragraphs which support with evidence the two or three reasons which form the support for your thesis.
5. Write an enthusiastic conclusion, or peroratio, which makes suggestions or predictions based on the truth of the thesis.
6. Note that at any point in the essay it is possible to include a digressio, which is an anecdote related to the topic and designed to entertain the reader, not to convince him or her.

Using the classical argumentative essay form, ESL students can produce long coherent texts. The ESL teacher can decide how to handle these texts and how to respond to them. It is probably a good idea to have students go through two drafts, with feedback on the first one restricted to syntax and rhetorical effectiveness, and with the second draft evaluated and graded on the basis of some combination of content and form standards. Again, the teacher is the best judge of how to manipulate the vast amount of student writing produced through this rhetorical mode.

Indeed it is the teacher who determines the day-to-day focus and pace of the ideal ESL class, and this key role is made easier to fulfill when students and teacher communicate within the clear and sensible rhetorical structures presented above. The sensitive ESL teacher will respond positively, yet not to an exorbitant degree, to even the slightest indication that a student has begun to incorporate a new concept into his or her use of the English language; the empathetic ESL teacher will use modeling feedback to correct a student rather than raising and strengthening that student's affective filter (Dulay and Burt 1977:95-126) by direct verbal assault; the perceptive ESL teacher will recognize when a slightly different direction suggested by a student or by something a student does is pertinent and might actually help the class as a whole to reach a higher goal than the one originally set by the teacher; the rational ESL teacher will ensure that classroom communication takes place on a plane in which reason is accorded highest value. That is why I suggest that successful ESL teachers will be even more successful if they include critical analysis of fiction, truth-searching logical conversation, and classical argumentative essay writing in their instructional approach.

> There is no teaching until the pupil is brought into the same state or principle in which you are; a transfusion takes place; he is you and you are he;

then is a teaching, and by no unfriendly chance or bad company can he ever quite lose the benefit.
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

NOTES

1 Rhetorical simplicity does not preclude semantic complexity.

2. Innovation by Mary Mufich-Vezilich in a reading class at the Applied English Center at K.U. in the fall of 1987.

3 Flashcard idea suggested by Zili He of the K.U. linguistics department in 1983.

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